Interview with Maurice E. Lee

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MAURICE E. LEE

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt

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Biosketch

Q: This is Lew Schmidt and I am interviewing Maurice "Mauri" Lee on his experiences in the U.S. Information Agency and its predecessor agencies.

I would like to ask Mauri to start out by giving me a brief bio sketch, indicating where he was born, what his background is, where he was educated and so forth. So Mauri, please go ahead.

LEE: Thank you. I was born in Erie, Pennsylvania on August 20, 1925. Upon completion of high school I joined the U.S. Army during World War Two and served in the European Theater with the 104th Infantry Division. After getting out of the Army I went to the University of Missouri and got a B.A. in Journalism. Later on in my career I received a master's degree in International Affairs from George Washington University and also graduated from the National War College.

Entrance Into U.S. Government Information Work

After getting out of the University of Missouri, I went to Paris, France for a year to try and learn French and had a part time job in the courier section of the U.S. Embassy. Later I was recruited as a Press Officer for the U.S. High Commission of Germany (HICOG) in Frankfurt. Following that experience in 1952 I was assigned as Assistant Information Officer in Bremen and later Information Officer. In 1954 I was sent to Yokohama, Japan where I was a Regional Public Affairs Officer and directed the American Cultural Center there.

Effectiveness of Information Program in Germany During HICOG Period

Q: Let me ask you a question. While you were serving in Bremen, was that your first experience in actual informational work?

LEE: Actually, I did it in Frankfurt too. I was a Public Relations Officer and a writer on the staff of the HICOG magazine.

Q: Did you have any particular indication there that you were making any impact on the German people? Or was that pretty difficult to pick up at that time?

LEE: Well, I think we did. First of all, the High Commission was a huge organization. It would be unheard of today to have an information staff the size of the one at the consulate in Bremen as we did in those days. So we were able to contact all elements of the media and the public in our programs which were both cultural and press oriented. In those days the Germans were, of course, just rallying from the war, rebuilding their country and had intense interest in anything American and in ways that we could help them re-develop their country and its institutions. So I felt we left an impact that is still so obvious today.

Q: Did you feel at any time when you were there some of the antipathy that was apparently felt by people who came in immediately after the war when the Germans had been so

indoctrinated that they exhibited an intense hostility to the Americans? And, if so, did you ever feel that it was diminishing as you went along?

LEE: Frankly, I expected it. But I didn't feel it. Bremen's a fairly small community. And it has a lot of wealth and sophistication. In that sense there was a certain aloofness. But I never felt that it was anger. They were very interested in our cultural center which was a fairly large one. It was always full, mainly with students who were very anxious to catch up after the war.

Q: I know the Germans are noted for being highly interested in intellectual pursuits and they're great discussants. They love lectures which are presumably on a highly intellectual level. Did you get into a good deal of that while you were there?

LEE: Yes, we brought speakers, experts in different fields, from the States. The Germans were so hungry for information because they'd been cut off from the outside world for so long. So there was no problem getting a crowd together. I personally went out and visited every newspaper in the consular district at least once every three months, and it was hard to get away from each one. They'd sit you down and give you a glass of brandy and want to talk all day. It really was a very interesting time to be there.

Q: Were those newspapers in Bremen ones that had been started by the Germans on their own volition? Or were they like some of the major newspapers that the Americans had started and the Germans gradually took over?

LEE: HICOG did start a nationally circulated newspaper in Munich. But the ones in my area of concern were basically provincial papers. They were permitted to start up again after the war and a lot of them did.

Q: You didn't have anything to do with actually organizing their start.

LEE: No.

Q: In order to put out American information.

LEE: No, that had been done by my predecessor.

Q: Yes, I understand. Now let's go onto your Yokohama experience.

1954: Regional Public Affairs Officer and Cultural Center Director: Yokohama, Japan:Nature and Impact of USIS Programs

LEE: Well, Yokohama was not unlike Germany in the sense that here I was in a country that was just rallying after a very destructive war. And again, there was great keen interest in Americans and things American.

Q: This was 1954.

LEE: 1954. And I stayed there for five years. I had three prefectures I was responsible for. They were Yamanashi, Shizuoka and Kanagawa. Three very different prefectures. Yamanashi was very primitive in many ways. Shizuoka was a beautiful place, noted for its fruit, fish, and cottage industries. Yokohama and part of Kanagawa was very industrial. And right in the middle of the consular district rose Mount Fuji.

I made a real effort to get out and meet people and talk to them. I had very close connections with the three governors of the three provinces, so it was very easy to get things done.

One of our principal tasks again was bringing in American speakers and American cultural events. And it was amazing how the Japanese responded. I think the USIS programs in Japan at that time had a great deal to do with the spreading interest in western culture that took place at that time. The Japanese started building concert halls, forming symphony orchestras. And today, as you know, there are many gifted Japanese performers and artists known throughout the world.

One little side thing, for for what it's worth. Our center in Yokohama was rather small and we were unhappy with it. So we were looking around for another building. We heard that the British Club which had been there for God knows how long and which had allowed no entry to Japanese, not even as guests, was going to close down. So we gave them an offer, and ended up getting their impressive building. The day we opened it as the American Cultural Center, it was a mob scene, all the Japanese dignitaries that were invited had never been allowed in that building and so they all came. In a sense we ended the colonial period for the Brits in Yokohama.

Q: Did the British run out of money for their club? Or hy did they decide to discontinue it? Do you know?

LEE: I think that a lot of the British had left at the beginning of the war, and many did not return. So there probably weren't enough British around to keep it going.

Q: And the Center stayed in there as long as you were in Japan.

LEE: Right. It closed down many years later when the Agency had major budget cuts. I found my time in Japan an interesting one. I think that we really made some inroads there. It was a great time to be there. Because the Japanese economy, its cultural institutions, its media, etc., were rebuilding and entering into a new era under a democratic system. We had a lot of influence upon the process.

Perhaps a small example, but there was great, great interest in the study of English. I had hundreds of students come to me about learning English. Or if they had a certain amount of English how could they get into an American university? It was overwhelming. My small staff and I just couldn't handle it. One day the Commander of the Seventh Fleet walked into my office. He said, you know, I've got a bunch of officers' wives down at Yokosuka (where the fleet was based) who don't have anything to do. Could you find something for them to do? And I said, yes, I've got the ideal thing. He sent one of the ladies to see me.

I gave her some office space and in turn she organized a center where the wives advised students and gave English lessons.

Q: You mean, you advised the Japanese students what to do if they wanted to get into an American university.

LEE: Well, the ladies ordered college catalogues from all over the United States. They advised students on visa procedures, helped them write letters to the colleges and taught English to the ones who needed it so they could pass the necessary tests to get into an American university. That was the beginning of the great tide of post-war Japanese students who went to the United States to study.

Q: Well, that was very interesting.

LEE: Right.

Q: Did you find a big market for your lectures and visiting dignitaries who came?

LEE: Well, again, like Germany, the Japanese were just starving for information about the outside world and in the process of rebuilding their country they needed a lot of advice and help. I remember, just to give you an idea, that in my area Sony, Suzuki and Yamaha, which today are huge Japanese corporations, were just starting out. One day somebody took me to see Mr. Suzuki. He was building motorcycles by hand in his garage. That was the beginning of the Suzuki Motor Company. I visited Yamaha one day. It was a store that had been converted into a small piano factory. They were making pianos one at a time. Sony was also a very small place. I remember when I left they gave me one of their first small portable radios. The official said, you wait and see; there will be a lot these in years to come.

Q: One thing that I'm interested in. You had quite a substantial library down there which was, I gather, about 90 percent or 95 percent in English. We often underwent criticism in

our own agency back in the Washington headquarters because it was felt that all these books in English were really not subject to much use by the recipient countries. And what was the use of having a big library under these circumstances. How did you find that? What did you—

LEE: Well, that was a running gun battle, as you know, for many years until we got a good translation program underway. But as the Japanese got to learn English a lot of them could read it and some taught themselves to read it. It wasn't perfect in the beginning needless to say. But as the translation program grew and the Japanese learned English our clientele grew and grew.

Q: You, I'm sure, remember very well our old friend Leon Picon.

LEE: Right.

Q: Who established the translation program in Japan.

LEE: Right. A very, very good officer.

Q: And I think he made quite a substantial contribution, both in his magazine the Beisho Daiori and also in the translations that he accomlished. I imagine you took his translations into the library once he got them going.

LEE: Right. And, of course, people in the field were putting pressure on the front office and on Washington to speed up the translation program. But like anything else it took time.

Q: Well, go ahead. I just wanted to get that comment in.

1959: Washington Assignment: Office of Private Enterprise Cooperation

LEE: After leaving Yokohama I was sent back to Washington where I was assigned to the Office of Private Cooperation. This became defunct later on. I believe it was reinstituted

under Mr. Wick. Our mission at that time was to get private enterprise, both foreign and American, to participate in the People to People Program. The People to People Program was a way of getting people in foreign countries to meet Americans through sister cities relationships, and other exchange programs. For example, among my responsibilities was the setting up of the San Diego/Yokohama sister city affiliation. Also, we had at that time a visit U.S.A. program aimed at helping to improve our poor trade balance, trying to get more foreigners to come to the United States. In this effort I was working with the travel industry to try and improve their services to foreigners. As an example of our efforts we had booklets printed in different languages which hotels could hand out to their staffs on how to treat foreign visitors.

The People to People Program had another interesting purpose to it as far as the Agency was concerned. It was the only constituency that the Agency really had within the American public. These were people in all walks of life. I remember one day I went to a meeting of the Hotel Committee of the People to People Program. There for the first time was the head of the Sheraton Hotels, the head of the Pick Hotels and the head of Hilton Hotels. And one of them stood up and said, you know, LEE, you're the first person who ever got the three of us together.

At any rate, it was a good constituency for us. But the program was getting so big and so unwieldy that our director then—

Q: Sandy Marlow?

LEE: No.

LEE: Edward R. Murrow.

Q: Oh.

LEE: Had decided that we should try to find some way to get this operation totally into the private sector. So I was given the assignment, having had quite a bit of experience in this field, to do a paper or a study on ways we could do it. After the paper as approved by Mr. Murrow, John Begg who was Deputy Director of the Office and myself went out to Kansas City and had lunch with Joyce Hall, founder of Hallmark Cards. We got Mr. Hall interested in setting up a foundation. As I recall, he offered one or two million dollars to set this up and take it out of the Agency but on one condition. That was that Dwight Eisenhower be the honorary head of it. As I recall Don Wilson who was the Deputy Director of our Agency at the time got in touch with the Eisenhower family, and Ike accepted it! And that's how we got the People to People Program out of the Agency and into the private sector where it remains today.

It was a very interesting time for me. I really learned a lot about my country. One thing I found out, and was amazed to see how much people, including senior business executives, want to be involved in something with the government, they want to make a contribution. There's a great wealth of people and talent out there that we can put to use when we need them. And they don't want anything for it except perhaps a little recognition.

Q: I think that's even more true in the middle part of the country where you're removed from Washington. Back here everyone feels they are either in contact with the government or else they don't want to be. They see too much of it. But I've experienced some of this same thing from people who come even from only 150 or 200 mile radius away from Washington. They have a great sense of honor and contribution if they can get attached somehow to a government project. At least they used to.

LEE: Well, I remember there was a sister city relationship between Kofu, Yamanashi in Japan and Des Moines. And I recall that when either the governor of Yamanashi or the mayor of Kofu stopped in Washington enroute to Des Moines, the military provided a plane for the trip, and the whole Iowa delegation from Congress went along. That gives you an

idea of the interest generated in that type of program. And I think it still prevails to a certain extent in many areas of the country.

1961-1963: Public Affairs Advisor to the Secretary General of CENTO in Ankara

After leaving the Office of Private Cooperation, I was sent out on an unusual assignment. That was as Public Affairs Advisor to the Secretary General of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in Ankara, Turkey. Now, many people don't know what CENTO is, or was, because it's defunct. But it was a treaty organization set up originally in Baghdad and called the Baghdad Pact. When the Iraqis suffered a revolution and dropped out of it, it was moved to Ankara. It consisted of the countries of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Great Britain. The United States was a participant but not a member per se. We did provide staff for the secretariat and funds.

I found out after I got there why they wanted a USIS man so much; USIA had a big printing plant down in Beirut. And by having a USIS participant they could get their printing needs free. I designed and edited the publications and would go to Beirut to make sure the printing met our specifications.

As I mentioned earlier, I also advised the Secretary General on public affairs matters. We had a fabulous Secretary General. His name was Khalatbary.

Q: How do you spell that?

LEE: K-H-A-L-A-T-B-A-R-Y.

Q: And he was the Secretary General?

LEE: Yes, he was from Iran and later became Foreign Minister. He was the first official that Khomeini had shot after the revolution. A fabulous man, a distinguished career civil servant.

I'm not sure CENTO had any real impact, perhaps some in the region. It did have some technical programs that were useful. But one of the interesting things for me personally was the annual conference with the foreign ministers of the CENTO countries, including the U.S. I accompanied the Secretary to these conferences. I was able to sit in on some very interesting meetings with Dean Rusk, Bhutto, Lord Hume and others.

Q: Was any of the work that you did for CENTO, outside of the design and bringing to life the publications, which we might call public relations work for them? Or how else did you serve?

LEE: Well, we did a lot of pamphlet work. And these pamphlets were printed in the languages of the region and distributed in those countries. The principal message was the security of the region. And as I said there were technical programs. For instance a microwave was built linking the countries of the region. There were some roads built and things like that that were an offspring of CENTO's efforts.

An interesting little anecdote about CENTO that affected the Agency. There was another USIS officer assigned to CENTO who will remain unnamed, who, as it turned out, was doing covert work in the information field for CENTO. The word got back to Mr. Allen the Director back in Washington. One day when I was back on home leave I got summoned to his office. I thought, my God, what have I done? I walked in. He looked at me straight in the eye. He said, I want to ask you something. Is there another USIS officer out there? Is he doing covert work? I said, well, sir, when I want to meet him I have to meet him either in his home or on a street corner away from CENTO. So I gather there must be something strange he's doing. But I don't know what it is. Well, it wasn't long before this gentleman was pulled back. Later Mr. Allen made a statement that no one in USIA was doing covert work and there never will be one. And I think that's true to this day from what I know.

Q: I'm a little confused on the dates here. What dates were you in CENTO?

LEE: I was there from '63 to '65.

Q: Well, now that couldn't have been.

LEE: I'm sorry, '61 to '63.

Q: Allen was only—Allen resigned at the end of '60.

LEE: Well, it was early—

Q: I'm sorry. He resigned at the end of '60.

LEE: Well, maybe I have my directors mixed up.

Q: Yes, because Murrow came in in March of '61. So it must have been Murrow that you were talking to. And what he said sounds very much what Murrow would have said.

LEE: Well, I thought it was Allen. But at any rate, it was in the Director's office. Another interesting aspect of this assignment was being seconded to the State Department and in turn seconded to CENTO. You did get a lot of travel and it gave you a chance to see a lot of South Asia and the problems that exist there.

1964: Information Office in Bonn, Germany

I was then assigned as Information Officer in Bonn. This was my second trip back to Germany. And of course I saw a lot of contrast to what I'd seen when I went there back in the early '50s.

Q: Had the German attitudes towards the Americans changed very much by that time? Or were your changes in other areas?

LEE: There was a much more mature relationship. And I think there was a healthy respect. We had an alliance going. And we were—our relations were quite good. Konrad Adenauer was the Chancellor at that time.

And I remember another little anecdote that gives you an idea of the feelings there at the time. One night right after work I got home and was just getting ready to have a drink before dinner. I got a phone call from my wireless file operator saying, he's shot. He's shot. Now he's dead. Come, come at once. I said, what are you talking about? And he said, your President's been killed.

So I got right in my car and rushed down to the office. After the President's death had been confirmed by two different wire services I called Ambassador McGhee, who as I recall was giving a white tie dinner that night for Chancellor Adenauer. He was taking a nap and his butler said, should I wake him up? I said, I think you'd better. When I told him —he was a personal friend of the President's—he was absolutely shocked of course and came immediately to the office. We worked through the night.

First we had to call everybody and cancel the dinner. The German custom at that time was to send out black bordered cards announcing a death. So the printing press had to be activated to accomplish this.

The next morning I left the building at about six o'clock. When I walked out of the Embassy there must have been several hundred Germans just standing staring at the building. They had brought flowers and candles which they placed on the steps. Later on I commented to my German teacher who was sort of a middle aged woman who was brought to tears at the mention of Kennedy's name, I said, I could understand why the Americans are so upset and shocked by the death of our President. But I can't understand the wave of grief here in Germany. And she said, well, it's very easy, LEE. To my generation, he was our Siegfried. This has been a country of old men.

We still have a large program in Germany. I am surprised that it is still as big. I served in two countries that were at one time occupied by us, Japan and Germany. I believe it was just difficult as heck to get these programs down to normalcy. Eventually they were reduced when we ran out of foreign currency and had budget restrictions. We maintained a very large program while I was there. It wasn't anything of an unusual nature that we took on. We had the traditional USIS program. And of course Germany was still re-building.

Q: They were still very receptive to our program?

LEE: Yes, yes. We had information centers in all the major cities. I think we still do. And we had even German American cultural centers where the Germans put in funds. Some would be located in other cities where we couldn't afford to be there on our own. And it was usually an American that headed them. But the Germans funded most of them. So I think that gives you an indication of the interest of the German government. They wanted us there.

Q: At one point as I recall while we were cutting back somewhat on our budget the Germans agreed to put a certain amount of money themselves into the program in order to retain the cultural centers without cutting down on any of them. I think it was probably at that point that some of the centers turned into German American cultural centers. Because they were partly funded by the—

LEE: Right. I remember when we were cutting back and the rumor would get around. For instance Bremen was going to be closed—the Lord Mayor of Bremen sent cables to Congress, and to the President. He was very upset that he was going to lose that center. A similar thing happened in several other German cities.

1965: Back to Washington As Area Coordinator For Europe

Following my German assignment in the summer of 1965 I came back to a job in the Agency which I found to be one of the most interesting jobs you could have in the Agency. And that's area program coordinator. I remember when Bob Lincoln who was Area Director for Europe talked to me about the job in Germany. I said, well, Bob, I can't even balance my checkbook. And he said, that's not the point. We have somebody to do that for you. But he said, you know where everything is in the Agency. That's why I want you back there. The Program Coordinator job was to find the resources that the area needed, everything from money t books and all the other things that the Agency dealt in. To get those resources for our programs in Europe was the goal. So I came back and I spent two years in that job and found it amazingly interesting and useful.

As a matter of fact I remember that was the time when Leonard Marks our Director, Howard Chernoff and Dick Schmidt waging a war on Capitol Hill to get the USIA Foreign Service career status. I think this was one of the high points in the history of our Agency. Career status improved not only our morale but our image with co-workers at State and other agencies of the government.

Q: Now, to go back just a minute to your finding resources to help out the European program. The reason I raise this question is because there was within the Agency, and it was spearheaded by one Tom Sorensen, who was, as you know, the Deputy Director for Policy Plans, to cut back Europe very strenuously on the grounds that this was an elite and effete group out there; that we probably didn't need to put as many resources into Europe as were putting in. He felt the size and scope of the European program was being perpetuated by the people who'd been around the European area a long time. I mean, he believed it was our people who wanted to perpetuate the program. And when you say that you were called back to see what you could do about finding resources, was this with the idea that you could unearth private industry resources that could be used to help the European program, thus cutting down on the amount of money the government was putting into it or what?

LEE: No, it was mainly just to fight the battle within the Agency, the very problem you stated that we were meeting resistance here and there. I recall one specific instance where we had a lot of pressure from the Bureau of the Budget which it was called in those days. We were called over there and given a lot of flack about the same thing you just stated. They brought Canada out as case in point because Canada is part of the European program. We almost lost our Canadian program because of that. Their argument was that Americans and Canadians are great buddies who often traveled back and forth to each others' country. Why do we need centers there?

We managed to keep part of the program. Ironically, that same budget examiner several years later went to Canada and when he came back he called me and said, think you should increase your program in Canada. He found that our Canadian friends had some misperceptions and resentments about us.

Q: Who was that?

LEE: I forget his name now. But as you know today we still have those problems with Canada.

Q: Yes.

1969: National War College

LEE: After my assignment as Program Coordinator, in 1968 I went into the 1969 class of the National War College. This was one of the highlights of my career. I think every officer ought to have that opportunity to go to the National War College or one of the service schools. These schools are set up principally so that various officers on their way up the career ladder in various elements of the government and the military learn to work together. It was a marvelous experience.

After War College: Vietnam

Following my year at the War College I was sent to Vietnam. About two-thirds of the military in my class also went to Vietnam. Needless to say anything that I wanted from the military while I was in Vietnam I got because of my previous association with my military classmates.

Speaking of Vietnam—another interesting thing that happened while I was Program Coordinator, Mr. Shakespeare was Director at that particular time. He felt very strongly about the threat of communism and anybody who'd ever worked for him knew this all too well. And I recall one time when he was presiding over a meeting he announced he wanted every USIA foreign service officer to serve a tour in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union. We tried to tell Mr. Shakespeare that this was not possible. Because there just were not enough positions in those countries to fill. And I remember my telling him, why can't you give people with Vietnam experience credit as having been close to communism? He said, “I want to tell you something Mauri, looking at a communist through the sight of a gun and looking at one eyeball to eyeball are two different things.” So he set up an orientation program where groups of senior officers went to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to visit these countries and meet some communists. I went on one such trip which was very interesting

As I stated earlier, following the National War College experience I was sent to Vietnam where I was number three and later became Deputy Director of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO). I carried the dual title of Deputy Director of that Office and Counselor of the Embassy for Public Affairs. We had a dual role there principally to—

Q: Pardon me. But at that time had Barry [Zorthian] left?

LEE: Yes, Barry had left and Ed Nickel who had replaced him arrived a little before me. He came in right after Tet (The horrendous North Vietnamese Army Assault coordinated all over South Vietnam. It came close to defeating the U.S. and South Vietnamese military forces. It was ultimately repulsed with great losses to the North, but it sparked a

psychological downturn in the U.S. and proved a major factor in our ultimate withdrawal). I came in later in 1969. It was a huge program made up of USIS officers, State Department people, CIA and the military. As a matter of fact, one of my deputies was an Army colonel. JUSPAO had several missions. One was the pacification program. It was our job to get out and convince the people through various programs to support their government which was in many ways a controversial program. We also were responsible for keeping the American press there briefed. We did have a small cultural program going. We were spread out all over the provinces of South Vietnam. In fact, the JUSPAO program was huge. To give you an example, one of my direct responsibilities was the rebuilding of the country's radio and TV stations. During Tet the Viet Cong had badly damaged the four TV stations and four main radio stations. So we brought over an NBC team of engineers who were in the process of rebuilding those stations. And I gather after I left they finally finished that job. So we had some nice modernized stations to give back to the North Vietnamese.

We had an old constellation that we sent up every night it could fly to broadcast into North Vietnam. We also dropped leaflets up there. We had such a fine printing operation, the RSC Manila, that we printed what was taken for counterfeit, bogus North Vietnamese money in the form of leaflets with a message and dropped them over North Vietnam. North Vietnam charged that we were trying to bankrupt the country because they were so good that people could cut the message off and use them as money. An interesting anecdote to that was a later director of the East Asia area had some of those as a souvenir in his safe in Washington. The Secret Service found out about it and were going to come over and take them away from him. We had a tough time explaining to them that they were really leaflets and not counterfeit money.

Q: Yes, I understand that your people who were up in the countryside were almost never or perhaps never the heads of the offices that were up there. Were these people, the heads of the office, State Department personnel? Or were they military personnel?

LEE: As you know, there were four zones. And we did have a senior USIS officer who was head of the Public Affairs Program per se in each of those zones.

Q: Did you have any other Americans?

LEE: He had other Americans under him. They could be military. They could be State. And then there was the province chief. And that could be a State Department man or military man. While he worked for that man, he also had a responsibility to us.

Q: Well, to what extent was he able to or did he try to get any of his own ideas on public affairs work over? And to what extent was he almost completely under the thumb of the Province Director?

LEE: This is always the problem when a guy's working for two different bosses. If there was a problem our man would come to us and we'd try to straighten it out at the Saigon level. I don't recall any serious problems. We didn't have that many people. I think there were around 200 Americans in JUSPAO. You're bound to run into personality conflicts. And everybody has his own idea of how to run the war. Some of the men that were really out in the boonies probably were doing some things that you wouldn't put under a “Public Affairs Program.” But we tried to keep our programs within a certain periphery. And if we heard of anything that was out of that periphery we would try to correct it.

Q: Well, now did the people in the provinces involve themselves in anything directly that you would call psywar as opposed to more of the standard operations of public affairs? And if they did, what kinds of things did they do?

LEE: Well, you have to realize that we were in PSYOPS in essence. We're no longer in PSYOPS. Later on we were taken out of it. But that's a broad term. It depends on how certain people define it. If I heard that one of my people were out on night raids (and I

know of several that did go out on them) or riding around the countryside in black pajamas like the Viet Cong trying to woo the people, I'd get word out to cool it.

One of the big programs we had, one of the reasons we were trying to get the TV stations back on the air, was that each village no matter how small was given a TV set. They put it in the middle of the village square where everyone could watch programs. Now, these programs obviously had a certain PSYOPS aspect, of propaganda, because we were trying to help the Vietnamese government win the Vietnamese people over to their side and away from the Viet Cong.

Q: The programs that went over this telecasting system were originated where? In Saigon? Or did they go out to feeder stations?

LEE: Well, they originally went out to feeder stations as I recall.

Q: I mean, were they on tape? Or were they original programs?

LEE: Well, in the beginning we had tape. We had tape fed into the machines.

Q: But these were done essentially in Saigon not in Washington.

LEE: As far as I know they were done in Saigon.

Q: And were there transmitter stations?

LEE: Yes.

Q: There had to be transmitter stations up in the—

LEE: Yes, but as I say in the beginning they were out. And we had both the radio and TV, not all the radio but most of them, the big ones.

I think we have dwelled long enough on Vietnam unless you have other questions.

Q: No.

1971: Return to Washington as Deputy Director for South Asia Area

LEE: I returned to the States in 1971. At the time the Agency had decided to split the Office of North African, Near Eastern, and South Asian Affairs (NEA) into two parts. It was never clear to me what the rationale was for their action although it was a very large area to manage. The result was that South Asia, consisting of the countries of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Nepal would become a separate new area called South Asia. Les Squires was made area director and I became his deputy. The year I was there I devoted myself to organizing the office and staff and did considerable travel in the area. Not long after I left, it was decided to reincorporate the office back into NEA. Apparently the State Department NEA was unhappy with the new arrangement because of having to deal with two sets of principals rather than one. I suppose there were other reasons.

But After One Year (1972), Deputy Director of Far Eastern Area

Meanwhile in 1972 I was summoned to the front office of the Agency and told I was to become deputy area director for the Far East. When I asked why, I was told that a political appointee, then currently a senior advisor to Vice President Agnew, was coming over to the Agency as the Area Director for the Far East. Since the gentleman in question had no Agency experience, I, as an experienced Agency officer, would help him learn the ropes. While acting as deputy as well.(SHORT BREAK IN TAPE)

Q: I think just before we stopped there for a moment I asked you if the political director that was coming on for the Far East Division, or East Asian Pacific was Kent Crane. You confirmed that he was. My recollection is that Kent Crane was a rather controversial character all the time he was in the Agency. If you feel that you can speak to that to some extent, I would appreciate your making a few comments about it. You're going to be able to

edit this later. And if you want to take some of this out you can. But I'd like to have you go ahead on this basis for a few moments.

LEE: Well, I personally liked Kent Crane. And to a certain extent it was enjoyable working for him. He was a very bright guy. He gave me considerable leeway in administering the program both in Washington and in the field while he played “the big game.” Another positive factor about Kent coming to the area was that Kent had amazing contacts in the Washington political scene. For instance, when we had our first East Asia PAO conference in Washington, we had speakers either at lunch or dinner or met them in their offices. Among them were the Speaker of the House, who was then Gerry Ford, Senator Henry Jackson, the head of the Ways and Means Committee, and Vice President Humphrey. It was amazing. Kent arranged all this personally. He knew all the astronauts. I think I met all the astronauts of that period who would come to Kent's office at one time or another. It was just amazing. He had important contacts in all walks of life. I remember one day he invited me to lunch and who joined us to my surprise but Edward Teller. And he put these people to work for us; we got some of them as speakers.

But Kent I think was seen by some people as terribly ambitious, very outspoken, and set in his ways. Also, I think that was a concern of Jim Keogh our Director at the time, who I think felt that Kent might be after his job. Now, that's just a hypothesis. Because as you know Jim Keogh was a very nice, sweet guy. Kent's parting of the ways came in a late evening discussion in the front office to which I was not privy. But I happened to be in Kent's office when he came back from seeing the Director. It must have been a heated affair. Because Kent was pretty upset and he decided to leave or was fired. I really don't know which..

During the period that he and I were there in East Asia, one of the big things that was going on was a new program that had been started by Allen Carter out in Japan called Infomat. I won't get into that here because I really didn't have too much to do with it. But it was a new approach to select audiences with certain specific materials in the libraries and certain set programs. It also was controversial. But Kent was very impressed with it. And

he had all the PAOs in his area at one time or another go to Japan and look the program over with an idea of starting it in all of our posts in East Asia. Some liked it. Some didn't. Pretty soon other Area Directors were going out to see it. It became a very controversial program. And I frankly lost track of it after I moved to the other side of the world. So I don't know to this day whether it's still employed in Japan or not. Maybe you do.

Q: Well, I can tell you a little bit about it. Carter used an early version of computer equipment. Computer monitors were used both for managerial purposes and for promulgation of direct program material. Books were to a large extent moved from USIS libraries and reading materials were put on computer to be called up on the monitors. This equipment was installed at great expense in all USIS cultural centers. Most of the Japanese felt that it was—I don't mind being on the record. Most of the Japanese thought it was a great mistake. Managerially, the computer was used to maintain the record (mailing and otherwise) of all USIS's Japanese contacts. Then the list was pared down to a total of about 10,000 people, Japan-wide, thus cutting out a lot of the Japanese who previously had been users of the centers, or had otherwise been useful contacts for USIS. And even though a great number of them were not—

LEE: I recall that. (End of tape)

—were not high ranking people, nevertheless, they in turn had their contacts. They could and did have informal face to face conversations with their countrymen. The subject matter put on computers was determined by Carter, and not infrequently was such that it didn't touch on a lot of the things in which the Japanese were interested. Some of it did. But even in those instances, the people preferred to come in there and look at books and get their information that way rather than to take it from a visual program. If it had been entertainment that would have been different. The Japanese are crazy about television, of course. But they didn't like it trying to instruct them in places like our cultural centers. They wanted to be able to sit, think about what they were trying to find out and not just have it come at them through a tape. The result was that most of the books were disposed of.

USIS Japan lost most of its book collection, because Al didn't want that interfering with the tape program. And the Japanese attendance at the centers fell off considerably except for those times that we would bring out important speakers, or similar programs. When Cliff Forster replaced Al Carter, he gradually abandoned the aging computer-like equipment, re-enlarged the contact lists, and returned the Japan program to a more personalized operation.

Q: Here we are resuming after a couple of months or so. There was a break in the tape and we have to do a bit of it over again. We will have to re-record some of it. Earlier, I discussed in the preceding discussion the matter of Al Carter's tour in Japan, and what came of it. Before that, however, I think we had been discussing your position as the Deputy Assistant Director for Asia. I believe that probably you had concluded both your story about that and about Vietnam. If you think you have, why don't you just lead in from there.

1973: PAO In The Philippines

LEE: In 1973 I was sent out as PAO to the Philippines, the Embassy in Manila. It was a very, very interesting assignment from a job point of view. I might mention that right off the bat I became involved in a turf battle. It seems that my Ambassador, William Sullivan who arrived at post at the same time, insisted that I be overall responsible for the VOA relay stations and the “RSO,” our regional printing plant in Manila, as well as the USIS operations. If you're familiar with VOA, or anyone that is, or with the RSO bureaucracy, you will know that this order raised holy hell. VOA and RSC were very unhappy that they would not be able to report directly to the Ambassador. So this matter had to be taken up with our Director, Jim Keogh in Washington and eventually he capitulated to the Ambassador. So this added a lot to what is a PAO's normal duties. So I often found myself dealing in VOA station problems, printing problems that, I must admit, were beyond my technical capabilities. But they were well staffed with very capable people and usually things went along quite well.

That period, which lasted four years, in the Philippines, was a very interesting time. We're all familiar now, the American public that is, with the excesses of the Marcoses. And I think one of the greatest tragedies of the Marcoses is the fact that they had the charisma, the brains and the following to make that country a major economic and political power in the Far East. As it turned out, they went the other direction and looted much of the country and the public treasury.

However, we had to live with Marcos even though we were very unhappy with the way he did things. And the main reason was our bases at Clark and Subic. These are very important bases to our security and the security of the Far East. Our embassy was the only American one that I know of in the world that had a full-time lawyer whose job was just to handle these negotiations, which seemed to go on from year to year. And of course the Marcoses were always holding us up for more money each time negotiations came up. It was a very tricky business. Also, there were a large number of younger people and certain people to the left, who were very much against these bases and used every opportunity they could to hold demonstrations and create problems from a public relations point of view.

But we did carry on quite a successful USIS program while I was there. We had good libraries and three branch centers down through the islands. I traveled extensively over the country while I was there. The Philippine people are basically very friendly and I would say, at least while I was there, mainly pro-American. Although our history with the Philippines ever since the Spanish-American war is spotty, to say the least, there's a ground swell of good will in the Philippines for Americans and for the United States.. So in many ways it was pleasant dealing with the Philippine people.

The Amazing Excesses of Imelda Marcos

The excesses of the Marcoses were sad. But their goings-on had a certain circus-like atmosphere. I could talk all night about some of the funny things that happened,

particularly with Mrs. Marcos and her driven desire to be known as a great cultural person. I might mention several anecdotes because I think they're rather amusing and point out to what extent this woman would go to impress people and to compensate for what seemed a deep down inside feeling of inferiority. One of the American news magazines—I can't remember whether it was Time or Newsweek—did a feature article on Mrs. Marcos called “The Iron Butterfly.” And while it was basically objective it wasn't terribly flattering to Mrs. Marcos. In one part of the article a well-known Western diplomat was quoted as saying that Mrs. Marcos had an inferiority complex because she lacked the cultural background and other necessities of being a First Lady. Well, she took umbrage to this, needless to say. At a reception several weeks after the article came out she came up to our Ambassador, William Sullivan, at a party and said, “Mr. Sullivan, are you the Western diplomat who was quoted in that story?” And he said, “Madame Marcos, this happens to be George Washington's birthday and I cannot tell a lie. Yes, I was the man who was quoted.” At which point Mrs. Marcos, in one of her usual grand scenes, ran out of the room crying. I might inject here that many Filipinos, including the Marcoses, believed that Sullivan had been sent out to bring down the Marcoses and their cronies. I personally never saw such an effort.

The next morning the Ambassador got a telephone call from Mrs. Marcos' secretary saying that Mrs. Marcos would like the Ambassador to join her for dinner that evening—alone. The Ambassador replied, “is this a command performance?”

And the secretary said, “from the tone of her voice, I would suggest it is.”

They were to meet at a well known restaurant out in a suburb of Manila. The Ambassador thought it strange if it was going to be a dinner alone that they'd be meeting in a public restaurant. But when he got to the restaurant he found it was closed for the evening. It was not unusual for Mrs. Marcos to close down establishments when she needed an orchestra or floor show at the Palace or needed a venue, as was this occasion.

He was led into the restaurant and was waiting for Mrs. Marcos to come when several busloads of people drew up and parked in front of the restaurant. Out stepped the leading cultural types, writers, singers, ballet dancers, you name it, whom Mrs. Marcos had rounded up to come to this dinner. When she finally arrived (she was always late and was referred to by many as the “Late Mrs. Marcos”), she had everybody seated and she had one long table where she sat across from Ambassador Sullivan and at each course of the dinner she would bring up a different group of diners and would converse about literature and music and opera and so on and so forth, trying to point out to the Ambassador that after all she was not culturally void.

I always knew when Van Cliburn, the American pianist, a favorite of Mrs. Marcos, was in town because I would always get a call from her office asking if I could get some Dr. Pepper out of the Commissary because they didn't sell it in the Philippine market and that happened to be Mr. Van Cliburn's favorite drink. Also, Mr. Van Cliburn never came with a passport so we always had to get him one.

She was famous for last-minute things, too. She was always expected to attend big events at the Cultural Center of the Philippines but she was always late. And so it got to the point that people would start stomping their feet and chanting, “Imelda, Imelda, Imelda,” wanting her to get there so the performance could get started, they would never start without her. I recall one time when we had Martha Graham and her dance group under our USIS sponsorship, were playing at the Cultural Center. Mrs. Marcos used to always love to throw big bashes after a cultural event of some significance. As the day of the performance drew near, we had no word from the palace that she was interested in giving anything. And lo and behold, the afternoon of the performance I got a call from Ambassador Sullivan, who happened to be down at the palace seeing the President, and he said, “I just want to alert you, Mauri, I think you're going to be called very shortly and be told that there will be a big bash after the ballet tonight that Mrs. Marcos is throwing, on very short notice. She's just commandeered the orchestra at the Hyatt Hotel for the

evening (which means they had to close down their nightclub), and you're going to get a call in a few minutes from her secretary to give them 200 names of people to invite on the diplomatic and American side."

This was the way Mrs. Marcos liked to work.

One of the highlights of my stay there was the visit of President Ford, after his trip to China. He had with him Henry Kissinger and a large entourage and a press contingent of almost 300 people, two planeloads, which we had to take care of. Mrs. Marcos again took the occasion to turn out one of the biggest shows I've ever seen. Even Barbara Walters told me she had never seen anything quite like it in her life. Mrs. Marcos decided that as the presidential procession proceeded from the airport to the palace, the President and Mrs. Ford should get a taste of Philippine history. So she took over the whole length of Rojos Boulevard, which I would say is several miles long, and had a history of Philippine culture, brought in dancers, tribes, even palm trees were brought from the South and planted along the route.

Q: You mean they stopped at each point?

LEE: No, you just drove along slowly.

Q: I see, so that the—you didn't stop to watch a performance for a few minutes, you just kept driving.

LEE: Except when they got down to the park, the main park, Risal Park, she had a chorus of 1,000 and three symphony orchestras merged into one to play and sing the two national anthems complete with fireworks. Needless to say, the entourage was an hour and a half late getting to the palace. But people in that procession saw one of the greatest shows I think that's ever been put on, despite the fact that there was a war in the south and troops were brought in to help with things.

The following day, the American entourage was taken out on the Presidential yacht for some more show biz. Also the two presidents were to have their official talks in Marcos' cabin. When it came time for the meeting Marcos escorted Ford into the cabin and closed the door in the face of Kissinger and the Ambassador. Since there was no one to take notes, I'm not sure a record of the meeting exists to this day.

I am not surprised that the Marcoses had their demise eventually. It came a little sooner than I thought it would, but it was inevitable. I think that it's for the best that they left the Philippines. What the future will bring remains to be seen. There are still many, many serious problems and I guess the new government will just have to whittle away at them.

Q: I know, at least I've been told, that Mrs. Marcos was sort of the mother of that big Cultural Center that was built out there and that she was very fond of it. This wasn't our cultural center was it?

LEE: No, our cultural center at that time was located over in Quezon City, but I can tell you an interesting anecdote about the cultural center. She did build the cultural center. It was there before I got there. But one day I got an anxious call from Ambassador Sullivan to come to his office, that an advance party was there from the Miss Universe pageant. And since I guess beauty contests come under public affairs, like everything else, I got summoned to the meeting. These people came to ask us if Mrs. Marcos could be believed. We said, “What's the problem?” And they said, “Well, she very much wants the Miss Universe contest here but there's no theater, including the cultural center, which is of sufficient size with the type of stage we need to put on this event.” At the time they had been draining part of Manila Harbor so Mrs. Marcos could put up a huge convention center near the cultural center. When Mrs. Marcos heard this, she took the Miss Universe group out on these muddy flats and dropped a coin and said, “I will build you a theater for Miss Universe right here.”

Q: How long was it before the Miss Universe—

LEE: This was going to be two years later, the Miss Universe contest.

Q: I see.

LEE: So they asked the Ambassador and me if we really believed this could happen. And we said, if Mrs. Marcos said it's going to happen, it will happen, we can assure you. So we think you can go ahead and plan a Miss Universe. So they went ahead and planned to have it in Manila in two years. That theater was finished about a week before they arrived back in town for the contest. But it was finished and we had a Miss Universe contest.

Q: I was just wondering what—did you run pretty much of a standard program in the Philippines other than that? Or did you have some particular objectives or unusual activities that—

LEE: No, I think that as I mentioned earlier, a major public affairs problem was the bases. Otherwise we ran a routine type of USIS program. I remember when Director Keogh visited the post he saw a little sign in the USIS library that said “No one under high school age admitted,” because we couldn't handle the crowds of students that used the library. He was pretty upset about this. He said, “do you realize that you may have turned away Ferdinand Marcos when he was a young person if you'd followed this policy back in the old days?” And I said, well, that's the chance we take, Mr. Director. Later on the Agency acquired a bigger building for the library after I had left. I also told Mr. Keogh when he asked me why we weren't doing more to promote travel to the United States, “Mr. Keogh, if you want to give every Filipino a one-way ticket, I can predict 90 percent of them will come to the States and they'll stay.” So there was no trouble selling the United States to the Filipinos.

Next Post, PAO in Korea: 1977

Q: I guess then your next assignment after the Philippines was to Korea. Did you go directly there or did you have home leave first or—

LEE: I had home leave.

Q: Then you got there very shortly after that.

LEE: Right, in 1977. I also spent four years there as the PAO and it was probably one of the most interesting—I must say, my whole career has been interesting, but this was one of the highlights of my period in the agency. At the time I arrived there, President Park was president of the country, a very strong dictator.

Visit of President Carter

Early on in my tour we had an official visit by President Carter and his wife. At that time, or just prior to his visit, I guess even in the campaign, Carter had pledged that he was going to pull the troops out of Korea—American troops that were stationed in Korea, about 43,000 men. This had the Koreans very, very upset because they saw our troops as the main bulwark against North Korean invasion. Obviously, 43,000 couldn't hold out 600,000 troops, but it certainly would not be very smart of the North Koreans to invade South Korea when they had to face American troops up there in the DMZ.

So when Carter arrived, the main purpose of the Koreans was to get his mind changed on this subject. So it was—in addition to all the ceremonies, which were very pleasant, a pretty testy visit until finally Carter relented. I was in the advance party for this visit in which members of the Korean government and people from the White House and several of us from the Embassy flew around the country and decided where the President should go and not go.

Should Amy Ride in the First Car in the Motorcoach?

One amusing aspect wasn't so amusing at the time because it took a heck of a lot of time to resolve. President Carter was insistent that in the ride from the airport to town that daughter Amy would ride with the Carters and President Park. And the Koreans, I imagine out of some cultural reasoning, objected strongly. The Carter White House just would not give in so it ended up that President Park's daughter rode in the procession also. That's how we resolved it.

Assassination of President Park

After Carter left, I guess the next big event that happened was the assassination of President Park by his CIA chief. And following that the coup of Chung doo Hwan, who later became President. The coup was a very interesting event, personally speaking. The night that it happened the Press Attach#, Norm Barnes, and I were at a friend's house for dinner when Norm got a call from a newspaper reporter stating that there was gunfire being heard in several streets of Seoul. He had heard there was an uprising out at the base in the south part of Seoul and that perhaps a coup was underway. We immediately went to the Embassy. When we got to the Embassy we found that the Ambassador had already gone down to the base to see what was going on, and the DCM, the Political Counselor, Norm and I stayed at the Embassy. It was rather interesting because Ambassador Gleysteen only had one telephone at the site where he was and he was reporting events as they were taking place to Washington on that one telephone line. Since he couldn't talk to us at the Embassy because he only had one line and he had to keep it open to Washington, Washington was sending us NIACT immediate telegrams telling us what was going on down the road two miles as recounted by the Ambassador to Washington.

Another funny thing occurred while we were waiting at the Embassy to see what was going to happen. I looked out the window of the Ambassador's office and saw an army column come down the street and stop in front of the Embassy. I thought to myself, they wouldn't dare try to do anything to the Embassy. The Korean guard went out and talked to the leader of the group and after a while he went back to his guard post and the patrol

proceeded up the street in their armored cars. We sent a Marine down to find out what was going on. He came back and said the Koreans were lost, they were looking for the DongA Ilbo, which was a newspaper they wanted to capture.

USIS Scores a News Scoop

There was a lot of confusion all through the night and no one was quite sure who was in charge. Then that morning my senior Korean press local got a summons from Chung doo Hwan whom he had known in school. Chung doo Hwan called him to his quarters and told him, you can go back and tell the American Embassy that I am in charge and they can deal with me from here on in. So it's interesting that a USIS employee was the one who got the final word. And of course we got the word to Washington immediately.

The Kwangju Uprisings

The Kwangju uprisings which followed later were a very, very testy period for us. This was when the students protested Chung doo Hwan. We had a cultural center in the city of Kwangju. We don't know to this day how many hundreds were killed in that uprising but it was a dicey situation for about a week. We lost contact with our branch PAO, Dave Miller, who was hiding out. The local employees were hiding him in different places each night. They finally found a way to get him out of town and we got him back to Seoul safely. The rioters did not touch our building, either.

During that period we had student uprisings in Seoul, too, and I remember one night, early evening—we had to close our building, of course—standing on the roof of my building right next to the city hall and looking down the street at about 200,000 students marching in our direction. I tell you, that's a hairy experience, particularly when you have no way of escaping. As it turned out, they got these people stopped short of our building and the city hall and I was able to eventually get home that night.

Lee's Opinion of Attitude of Students Toward U.S. in 1977-81 Period and Evaluationof Library as a Part of USIS Program

Q: In view of the strong anti-American feeling that unfortunately is developing in Korea today and seems to be prevalent heavily among the students, I would like to ask if you encountered any of that sort of feeling among the Koreans in your time. If so, among which elements of the population? And particularly did you have enough contact with the students to know how they felt?

LEE: Well, of course, students were our principal customers at the center because of the large library we had. But the time I was there the anger of the students was directed towards the military in general and Chun Doo Hwan in particular. After all, under Park they didn't have much freedom either. But at least he was ensconced as a President fairly legally. Chun Doo Hwan cracked down on a lot of things. Most of the student riots with the exception of the period during the Kwangju incidents were confined to the campuses. And if it got too bad they just closed the school and dispersed the students. Their anger was directed principally while I was there to the government and not to the Americans. There is a new hitch now because of the desire to reunite the North and the South. At the time I was there that was almost unthinkable. People talked about it. But no one saw it as a practicality because of the attitude of the North.

Q: At the time of your incumbency, then, you didn't feel that the students were turning any of their antipathy towards the United States because of the U.S. apparent support of the regime.

LEE: Oh, there was some criticism of us in liberal circles, that we were not tough enough on Chun Doo Hwan and his violations of human rights. While we could exert some pressure, you must remember we were dealing with a sovereign country. I know that the Ambassador had some very strong conversation with Chun Doo Hwan at that time. I met Chun Doo Hwan, who kept a pretty low profile initially, just once when he gave a garden

party. He was a very formidable looking guy, very, very stiff. He was the sort of peson I wouldn't feel comfortable around.

Q: So you felt that even though there was criticism of the U.S., it hadn't developed into strong anti-American feeling.

LEE: Again, it's like the Philippines. You're between the devil and the deep blue sea. Because you've got to keep both sides of the aisle content to achieve your objectives. Human rights in Korea, of course, has always been a problem. I see now in today's paper for instance that the current president is being criticized because he's not tough enough on the students. So it's a no win situation in many cases.

Q: Did you have a large utilization of your libraries by the student population?

LEE: Yes.

Q: The reason I ask that is because, again, when I was sent out in one of my last incarnations with the Agency, it was to make a study of the effectiveness and value of the libraries. And again, there was a feeling in Washington—nurtured at that time by Dan Oleksiw (then Assistant USIA Director for East Asia and the Pacific) that the libraries were not really worth very much and ought to be cut back. I think what they wanted me to do was to come back with a statement saying, oh, the libraries were not worth their salt. On the basis of my findings in all posts I visited, I didn't and couldn't feel or respond that way. That's why I wanted to get your—

LEE: Well, let me tell you this. I never was a head counter in the library. Only the people that came from Washington were. I was interested in who was in the library, not how many. And I knew that we were getting the right kinds of students and adults. Now, just as in Japan in the earlier years, in Korea there was a great demand for English teaching. I mean, you could set up an English school on a corner and make a helluva lot of money. I know that my daughter and son taught English and made something like ten dollars an

hour. Great demand. And Koreans are smart, quick people. They catch on easily. And they realized, you know, that their country was emerging as a major industrial power. Industries needed people that had knowledge of English. We also had a huge number of Koreans going to the States to go to school. We had very good speakers programs, too. I was very happy with the program in Korea.

Q: You felt those were well attended.

LEE: Yes, definitely. By that time the Agency was getting top notch people. They were the caliber of Jeane Kirkpatrick and Mike Armacost to mention two I remember.

Q: As a matter of curiosity, who was the political counselor when you were there?

LEE: Most of the time—now you've put me on the spot.

Q: It wasn't Don Renard was it?

LEE: No, no. Now I remember. It was Bill Clark who later went to Tokyo as DCM.

Q: Was Gregory Henderson in Korea at any time when you were there?

LEE: I know the name very well. But I don't think he came while I was there.

Q: He was the culture center director in Kyoto during my period.

LEE: Yes, but he also was very knowledgeable of Korea, of course.

Q: Yes, he became very knowledgeable on Korea and had a big set-to with Don Renard when Don was Political Counselor. I wondered if that had occurred at your time on post.

LEE: An old colleague of yours and mine in Japan was Ambassador. As a matter of fact he had asked me to come out. That was Dick Sneider who is now deceased.

Q: Yes.

LEE: But he remained there just a short time after my arrival. And then Bill Gleysteen came out, who was an outstanding Ambassador in my judgment.

Q: Well, is there anything further that you can remember in Korea or wish to say about Korea?

From Korea to Israeli: 1981

LEE: Well, they say from the frying pan into the fire. I got a call one night from the Agency in the middle of the night to go to a place I never dreamed I would serve. I visited there once as a tourist. That was to Israel. And I thought, my God, at this point I need a quiet post after the Philippines and Korea. But duty calls. I didn't realize what I was getting into. It was one of those cases where the Ambassador wanted you there yesterday type of thing. And I only got 20 days stateside, no time for preparing for such an important and volatile part of the world.

Q: Was that Sam Lewis?

LEE: Yes, Sam Lewis. By the time he left he had served there about eight years. As I mentioned, I had no time to prepare myself. I don't consider myself a Middle East expert by any means. And as I came to learn later just to understand Lebanon, which was so intertwined with Israel's political and military goals, and all of its intricacies you could study for a lifetime.

When I got there and I found a terrific program, a very tough and hard working staff. I was preceded by one of our best officers, David Hitchcock who had built a very good program. The local staff was a multi-national type of staff, mostly Jews who had immigrated from all over the world, even one from China. In some of the countries I served I knew if I went on

vacation nothing would get done until I returned. In Israel if I went on vacation the Israeli staff would take over the program.

They were very professional. I'm fond of all of them. I don't know. There is never a dull moment in Israel. There was some crisis every hour on the hour. You had a constant stream of visitors from the United States. Practically every Congressman had to show his face in Israel because of the power of the Jewish community in the States. You had this constant search for peace with Phil Habib popping in and out. And then McFarlane followed him. Then Secretary of State George Shultz would drop in every once in a while and he'd have a little shuttle diplomacy. And, of course, the PAO was expected assist these principals whenever they were in town. Habib wanted me around to make sure no newspaperman got near him. His mysterious goings and comings made for lots of speculation and publicity which I think he secretly enjoyed. We were located in Tel Aviv, and were constantly going up the hill to Jerusalem. As you know the capital is in Jerusalem, which we don't officially recognize, particularly East Jerusalem in which we will not do official business with the Israeli government. They tried to play a little trick by moving one of their ministries over to East Jerusalem. But we didn't bite. We said if the Minister wants to see the Ambassador he can meet him at the King David Hotel in West Jerusalem.

Going back to our excellent USIS program, the Agency serviced us I think the best I've ever been serviced at any post. We had top notch speakers. And, of course, there's a lot of interest in Israel. And then the Lebanon war, of course, complicated matters tremendously. At one time we had nearly 2,000 members of the media in and out of Tel Aviv covering the war in Lebanon. And they all wanted to see and talk to the Ambassador. All the senior officers had to share the briefing load although the Ambassador, the press attach# and the political counselor carried the burden.

One of the interesting things about being there was that I met a lot of very important and interesting people. And you got involved in everything. I remember once that Elizabeth

Taylor was visiting Tel Aviv. I won't get into what the problem was. But she had a problem. And her staff came to me for help and somehow we got it solved. So you never know who you're going to meet in this kind of a job. Sometimes it seemed like sheer “show biz.”

Sam Lewis was a very tough guy to work for, but I respected him immensely because he had one of the toughest jobs I've ever seen in the Foreign Service. He had to keep the White House happy. He had to keep the State Department happy. He had to keep the Pentagon happy, and members of Congress. He had to keep the Jewish lobby happy. His American colleagues in the Arab world were taking pot shots at him all the time. Obviously they weren't always on the same track in the approach to resolving the Middle East problem. And I must say today that I just don't see any solution to the problem until both sides make greater concessions toward each other.

Q: What was the main thrust of your program in Israel?

LEE: Well, it was largely media oriented. We did have cultural events, too. I'd say we had a pretty balanced program under the circumstances. But the press in Israel is very powerful and very aggressive. The political science faculties at Israeli Universities are very good and were constantly demanding the top Americans as speakers. Israelis love to argue, not debate issues. If you get two Israelis together and get them to agree on anything that's a major accomplishment. I recall that one day after I'd been there about four or five weeks one of my Israeli employees came in and closed the door. He said, “Mr. Lee, I don't want to embarrass you. But you're going to have to be a lot tougher if you want to survive in this place.” I took that message to heart. I remember my first victory. Several weeks later I was at a dinner party and the head of Israeli broadcasting was there.

Q: Head of Israeli what?

LEE: Broadcasting and television. And we were having a heated discussion with everyone else chiming in. I finally started pounding the table and screaming at him. All of a sudden

everybody stopped talking. And one of the people said, congratulations Mauri, you've just passed the cultural barrier.

Q: From then on I knew I had to speak up loud and clear if I wanted to be heard.

LEE: Israel is a fabulous country to serve in. It is still a developing country. It's a crisis-ridden country. I've never seen so many travel agencies in one town as in Tel Aviv. When I mentioned this to an Israeli friend he said, “Well, my God, if you had to live here in this tension all the time you'd want to get out every chance you had.” I also remember something my housekeeper told me. I used to take walks every once in a while in the evening when I just arrived. And I said to her, “It's amazing that when the news comes on at nine o'clock on television, I could see that the television set was on in every house I went by and there wasn't a car moving on the street.” And she replied, “Well, if you had two of your sons wounded in two wars, you'd listen to the news every night, too.”

Q: What was, for instance, the principal function of your press operation there?

LEE: Well, first of all we had the Wireless File which we had to get out to our key audience. We had that pretty well automated towards the end of my tour there. We had constant press inquiries night and day from both the Israeli and foreign press. Anything that happens in the United States of any significance, I don't care what it is, it's important, it has an effect in Israel. If somebody sneezes in the White House they catch cold in Israel. So we were constantly on the phone with the press and government types.

We also tried to place other types of stories that the Israelis were interested in. But the Israelis had one main concern. And that was the security of their country and its relationship to the United States. Next to the Prime Minister, the American Ambassador to Israel is considered the most powerful man in the country. I recall a funny thing that happened to illustrate this. The Lewises, who were very wonderful hosts, tried to have a cultural evening every two or three months. So a USIS Junior Officer Trainee got the bright idea of having a Mardi Gras evening. There were a lot of Israelis there and

everybody came in costume. They elected a king and queen. Well, needless to say Sam and Sallie Lewis were selected king and queen, complete with robes and crowns. Lewis was considered so powerful that some people referred to him behind his back as the high commissioner because he represented the United States. He was very sensitive to that. You never called him that to his face.Pictures were taken. We had a rule about pictures involving the Lewises. But the JOT (Junior Officer Trainee) apparently wasn't aware of it. No pictures went out to the press of the Lewis' until they personally checked them out. Well, these pictures got out, unfortunately. The next day's headline in one of the leading papers was Lewis promoted from high commissioner to king. Needless to say the cultural attach# who was in charge of the event was summoned into the front office and got a real dressing down and the JOT took a long time getting over it. This anecdote should not detract from the fact that Sam and Sallie Lewis were extremely popular in Israel.

Intensity of Israel. Interest in American Attitudes and Policies Made Press Placement andHigh Level Contacts Easy

Q: Did you put out any publications there? Did you place much information with the press?

LEE: Yes, we had a very good rate of placement. And we also had a very targeted list of people to receive not only Agency publications, but subscriptions to key American journals. One thing about Israel it's very easy to deal right up to the top. The President of Israel and the Prime Minister, at least then, were accessible. When we had a VIP in town who was going to see the Prime Minister I often accompanied with the Ambassador. I sat in on many meetings with Prime Minister Begin. Very relaxed atmosphere, but always intense discussion.

Q: Yes, I'm sure. I don't suppose the—well, there were so few instances really in which there was any kind of a real controversy between Israel and the United States I almost feel —

LEE: Well, I can recall one that really created a lot of tension and that was over the AWACs to Saudi Arabia. Anytime anything was sold to the Arabs in the area of military hardware, they really got on top of us about it.

Q: And this was pretty unanimous among the entire population?

LEE: Oh, yes. Yes. I'll give you a case of what it was like. Sometimes an American officer would be assigned from a country in the Arab world to an assignment in Israel. He had to do a lot of selling before the Israeli staff and Israeli contacts would believe that he was neutral and represented only official U.S. positions on issues. They just didn't trust anybody who had anything to do with Arabs. You had to be there to feel it. It's unbelievable this intensity.

Q: Do you have any other comment on that?

LEE: Well, I might just say that it went the other way. I understand that anybody that served in Israel and then went to an Arab country had a similar problem. When I went to my first PAO conference in the region the Ambassador said to me, “Mauri I want to warn you take your armor with you.”

I said, “what do you mean?”

He said, “you don't know what it's like to be a Jew amongst all those Arab.” Meaning all the other PAOs would be from Arab countries, frustrated by what they considered pro-Israel bias in our foreign policy. When I got to the conference, my colleagues bitched constantly about Israel.

Q: When we came to the end of the last tape you were just referring to the fact that every time you went to a PAO conference in your area your fellow PAOs were bitching because of the highly pro-Israel policy on the part of the U.S. government and how difficult it made

it for them to carry on any kind of a program in the Arab world. You want to pick up from there?

LEE: The only retort I could make to that was, hell. I only implement the policy. I don't make it. That was the best defense I could put up.

Q: Do you have anything else that you'd like to say about the Israeli program and what you thought the USIA program contributed to our standing in Israel?

LEE: Well, it was easy to program in Israel because of this intense connection and concern with everything the United States does. And again, I mention that there was easy accessibility to the top publishers, University presidents, I knew them all on a first name basis. It was not that I was so great; it's just that they were so interested in what we had to offer and could give them. We had a very good library servicing out of Washington. We had a documents element in our library. And if a scholar wanted certain basic documents that are only obtainable in Washington we would pay out of our program funds to have these sent to us. Sometimes by cable if they were that important. So they got serviced well.

So I think that in answer to the last part of your question that we served a very useful purpose. Generally, you didn't have to convince Israelis about the goodness of U.S. policy towards Israel. It's only when it diverted a little bit or did something favorable towards the Arabs that they'd get up and scream.

Q: I suppose the question I have is since Israeli technology is so far advanced and I'm sure that they subscribe to a lot o the major news services, what was it that you could give them in terms of information and coverage that they couldn't get from—

LEE: They wanted back up and documentation. Because they're great analysts. There's no such thing as a short newspaper column in Israeli. I mean, the words flow very freely

both qualitatively and quantitatively. Of course, they were always looking for inside information.

Q: Well, what could USIA do or USIS do that was not available for the Ambassador and the political set up for the Embassy to do. Were you able to do things or get information that was not available to Israelis through their contacts with the rest of the Embassy?

LEE: To be certain that the correct word and a unified word got out, people who had access to the press were rather limited. Basically the press attach#, myself, the political counselor and the Ambassador, who had a few select people that he would deal with on a one-to-one basis.

Q: Do you think you got a faster and wider feed on important matters than they got through the Embassy itself?

LEE: Well, they didn't go to the Embassy.

Q: No, I mean, do you think—what I'm saying is do you think that our mission out there that you as part of our mission, that you got a better feed and feel for media response and media output in the United States and in other things than the Embassy itself did?

LEE: Yes, but I was the Embassy outlet for information. Now, for instance, I'll give you a case in point.

Q: Well, how about incoming information?

LEE: You mean from Washington?

Q: Yes.

LEE: Well, that's what I'm talking about. For instance, the wireless file. The Ambassador wanted that on his breakfast table. And if it wasn't there I heard about it pronto. And he

read that thing from beginning to end, as did senior members of the government and the media. The wireless file serves a useful purpose because it gives the documentation to the news of the day. You get an AP summary of a speech by Secretary of Defense concerning Israel;the Israelis want the whole text. They don't rely on that news story. They want to see the substance, the whole story.

I remember one interesting thing. President Reagan gave a speech which had a portion of it devoted to the Middle East while Secretary Casper Weinberger was making his first official visit to Israel. I was traveling with him. The night of Reagan's speech night the Minister of Defense was giving a big party at the Hilton Hotel in honor of Weinberger at the same time the President's speech was coming through on the wireless file. I'd been instructed by Mr. Weinberger to get him a copy of that speech as soon as it came through. It had an embargo on it. In the meantime, we were comparing the advance text with the actual speech coming by VOA. It turns out that the President had made a last minute change in the text. I forget what the change was, but it was a very important one at the time. It affected the Israelis considerably. What if we had just handed out that wireless file without making sure every word was right—? I got on the phone to Washington right away and told them of their error. They didn't even know about it. They then sent out the correction immediately.

Abba Eban, who's a prolific writer, would call me up and say, you know, I need such and such a document. I can't get it here in Israel. Can you get it for me? And I got it for him. So much time was devoted to the dispensing of information. But we also had an active cultural program. I don't want to mislead you on that.

Q: No.

The Probable Future Problem for English Language Speakers in Israel

LEE: Now, the libraries were very popular because a lot of Israelis can read English. However, we do have an upcoming language problem, among younger Israelis. Young

Israelis are not learning English to the extent one would expect. Their parents and forefathers, many of whom came from Europe, in many instances English was their second language. So I think the day is coming in Israel when we will have to start putting out all of our publications in Hebrew. We do put out press releases in Hebrew and English. But we'll have to start concerning ourselves with books, magazines and pamphlets in Hebrew.

Q: To what extent are there other languages used in Israel in view of the fact that you have such a conglomerate of Jewish populations coming from so many different areas?

LEE: Well, a lot of them learned to speak Hebrew. The problem with Hebrew is it is very difficult to read. A number of Israelis on my staff could not read Hebrew well enough to give me a digest of a newspaper article.

Q: And yet the newspapers to a large extent—

LEE: Yes, all major newspapers are in Hebrew with the exception of the Jerusalem Post, which is in English. But all of your top leaders—I think there was only one man in the cabinet who didn't speak English. That was the Deputy Prime Minister. He didn't speak any English at all. He spoke French though. So if you spoke French you could communicate with him. Shamir's English was weak when I first got there and improved as he made a real effort to learn it. So Hebrew wasn't a problem for me while I was there. It will be a problem later, I think. We tried to bring speakers who spoke Hebrew. At least a couple on my U.S. staff spoke Hebrew—my Assistant Cultural Attach# and the Press Attach#. But they are Jewish. This is a rather delicate matter. You don't want an Embassy full of American Jews because they speak Hebrew. The Israelis will be the first to tell you that.

I remember the rumors going around that Ambassador Lewis was going to be reassigned. Every once in a while I had a luncheon for the publishers of the newspapers and Lewis would attend. After lunch he'd hold a give and take. The first question asked on that day

was who's going to be your successor? And he said, I don't know that I'm leaving. But he said let's be hypothetical. If I was leaving, who would you like to replace me? The spokesman for the group said, I'll tell you one thing. We don't want a Jew.

Q: Who is the present Ambassador of Israel?

LEE: You've got me on that. I can't think of his name, very prominent guy. Anyhow he's leaving to become Ambassador to the U.N. And the new one will be Bill Brown who was formerly the DCM during the first part of my tour there. He went to Thailand as Ambassador.

Q: He went to Thailand?

LEE: Yes, he's coming from Thailand to Tel Aviv.

To get back to my point on the language problem.

Back to Washington to Become Chief Inspector of USIA

Q: Well, that about covers your Israeli experience.

LEE: By this time I'd been overseas eleven years. And I thought it was time to come home. I was appointed Chief Inspector. And the period to follow was one of the less pleasant periods of my—what has been an otherwise very interesting and happy career. I walked right into a hornet's nest so to speak. At that time there was a movement in Congress to require all agencies of the government to have an Inspector General under the Inspector General Act. These inspectors general were to be appointed by the President from outside the Agency to which they would be assigned. The theory on the Hill, simplified, is that you can't inspect yourself. This, to their minds, leads to all sorts of corrupted practices. I don't agree with this. I don't know of any Chief Inspector that went out and inspected a

country post and got the PAO fired so that he could have his job. But that was used as one hypothetical example by a Congressman.

It was determined that the Agency had to do this. The Congressman that heads the committee that handles this is Congressman Brooks. He was adamant that the Agency comply with his request that a Foreign Service Officer not fill this position or that of Assistant Inspector General, which eventually was filled after they abolished the Chief Inspector position. So finally he and Wick made a deal that I would be grandfathered in the job. And after I left they would put a non-Foreign Service Officer into the job.

They did appoint an Inspector General from the outside. In another compromise, after considerable pressure from the Foreign Service, my position was filled by a retired Foreign Service Officer.

Q: So you were technically the deputy.

LEE: Yes, there were two deputies. I was the one for Foreign Service evaluations and inspections. The other one was for auditing. And he was an outsider. So there was no problem on that side of the shop.

Well, to make a very long story short, when I finally decided to retire at the end of January 1986, I sent a note to Mr. Wick and told him of my plan. He sent a message back he did not want me to retire, but instead wanted me to become the Assistant Director for East Asia, something I'd always wanted to be since I'd been the Deputy. But I thought it over. I decided I'd rather walk out of the building than be carried out or kicked out as some of my colleagues had in the past, that I'd been around long enough. So I decided to retire.

Well, just before retirement date came they came to me and said, would I mind staying in the job? I could retire. But would I come back to work the next day and stay on until they found a successor? The Foreign Service elements of our Agency were up in arms, the fact that we would have an outsider handling Foreign Service.

Q: I've seen that happen before and I know exactly what it means.

LEE: So I thought this would be a month or so. Well, it went on for months and months. Finally, it reached the point where if I stayed longer I would cut into my annuity. So I left and the position remained vacant for awhile, but the battle went on within the Agency. As I mentioned earlier, they finally reached some sort of a compromise where they brought in an officer who had been a former Foreign Service Officer but was retired, no longer on active duty. And that's where it stands now. And I have since done several jobs for them. But basically I'm out of it. End of story.

Q: So that concludes your career with the U.S. Information Agency.

LEE: Yes.

Q: Well, it's been a most interesting interview, Mauri. And I thank you very much for taking all this time.

LEE: My pleasure.

End of interview